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SUBJECT: CREEPING TOWARDS AN LUA?

REF: 2008 MAJURO 0148

¶1. SUMMARY: In response to a request from president Tomeing, Ambassador Bishop met with the President to deliver a letter reaffirming USG commitments under the Military Use and Operating Rights Agreement (MUORA) of the Compact. In addition to delivering the letter the Ambassador also discussed the need for the GRMI to include Ennibur (Third Island) in any RMI recovery plans stemming from damages caused by the recent wave surges and clarified the USG position in regards to funding for the Majuro airport improvement project. END SUMMARY.

¶2. President Tomeing had previously requested a statement of the long term USG financial commitment to Kwajalein (REFTEL). The letter the Ambassador delivered provides that statement, focusing on the mechanics of Kwajalein impact funds and the time frame found in the MUORA. President Tomeing offered his thanks for the letter and noted that it will be useful in upcoming discussions with the landowners. The President stated that he plans to begin these discussions in early February, possibly around Kwajalein Liberation Day on February ninth. He has already nominated five GRMI representatives to be on a working group to move towards a completed Land Use Agreement (LUA) and hopes the landowners will soon name their five representatives.

¶3. The Ambassador also reminded President Tomeing that, while USAKA is doing all it can to assist the residents of Ennibur island with their water needs, the contamination of the lens wells on Roi-Namur island during the recent wave event has limited USAKA's ability to do so long term. Therefore the Ambassador stressed the need for the GRMI to integrate the needs of Ennibur into any proposal designed to address damage from the waves.

¶4. Finally, the Ambassador offered clarification on the USG's position regarding funding for the Majuro airport improvement project. After noting the funding for the current phase will go forward as it does not involve land reclamation, and was approved prior to the enactment of the land reclamation law, the Ambassador stressed that the USG is currently developing a legal policy on the GRMI's new land reclamation law. He cautioned the GRMI that the policy could interrupt the second phase of the airport project. The President stated he would wait for the legal analysis, but was confident that a solution could be reached no matter its outcome.

¶5. COMMENT: President Tomeing seemed pleased to get the letter on the USG's Compact obligations, and was relatively positive that some agreement on an LUA can be reached. President Tomeing stated he has made it a GRMI priority to complete an LUA prior to year's end. He continually cites the need to work on the LUA issue as the reason he frequently stays in the country while sending the Foreign Minister to events such as the recent Palau inauguration and the upcoming PIF meeting in Suva. Post remains cautiously optimistic that Tomeing's intentions will bear fruit. END COMMENT.

BISHOP